

They see Washington bouncing from one manufactured fiscal crisis to the next but never addressing the real and ongoing crisis of our disappearing middle class.

The truth is, while we hear a lot about the wide distance between Democrats and Republicans, the widest and most important distance in our political system is between the content of the debate in Washington and the concerns of hard-working people in places such as Wisconsin. That distance parallels the large and growing gaps between rich and poor, between rising costs and the stagnant incomes, between our Nation and our competitors when it comes to education and innovation—and it is truly hurting people.

When my grandparents were raising me, I learned that if you worked hard and played by the rules, one can get ahead. The Wisconsinites I talked to grew up learning that very same thing. They are working as hard as ever to get ahead, but many are finding they are hardly getting by. People are still working for that middle-class dream: a job that pays the bills, health coverage they can rely on, a home they can call their own, a chance to save for their kid's college education, and a secure retirement. But, instead, too many are finding that even two jobs are not enough to make ends meet, and those jobs are hard to find and hard to keep. They are finding the homes they worked so hard to own are not even worth what still remains on their mortgage. They are finding that the cost of college is going up, and they are worried they might never be able to retire comfortably.

That is the biggest gap of all, the gap between the economic security Wisconsinites worked so hard to achieve and the economic uncertainty they are asked to settle for.

If we cannot close that gap, we might someday talk about the middle class as something we used to have, not something each generation can aspire to. We all get it. We all see this happening. While Wisconsinites do not agree about what we should do, they want to see us working together to find a solution, even if it takes some spirited debate.

But when they look across that yawning divide to Washington, they see us advancing talking points and playing politics instead of putting our varying experiences and talents to work solving these problems.

But I am optimistic. I did not run for the Senate just because I agree with those complaints. I ran for the Senate because I think we can do better. I know I have a great example to follow in the people of Wisconsin. These are particularly tough times for my State. Even as the National economy is rebounding, businesses in Wisconsin and middle-class families in my State remain stuck in neutral.

The manufacturing sector that sustained our prosperity for generations has taken a lot of hits—some that could have been prevented and others

that are simply a factor of our changing economy and our changing world. But we do not see Wisconsin workers and business owners wallowing in crisis or looking for someone to blame. Our State motto is one word, "Forward." That is the only thing we know.

In the short time I have been here, I have made it my mission to fight to make sure Wisconsinites have the tools and skills they need to succeed in a "Made in Wisconsin" economy that revitalizes our manufacturing sector and rebuilds our prosperity—and this means respecting our labor.

It means investing in regional hubs of collaborative research and development, supporting the technical colleges that are working to provide a skilled workforce, and encouraging public and private partnerships to revitalize our manufacturing sector. But it all relies on the talent of individuals who are working hard to help our communities move forward.

Years ago John Miller, a disabled Marine Corps veteran who lives near Milwaukee, invented a new kind of motorcycle windshield that uses LED lights embedded in acrylic. For years he has been working hard to find investors to bring his idea to market. He has been testing different acrylics, showing off his work at trade shows, and spending months trying to get approvals from the Department of Transportation. Investors are lining up at John's door. Harley-Davidson even wanted to buy his patent. But he doesn't just want to make a profit, he wants to make a difference. He is holding out until he knows that everything in his product will be made and manufactured in the United States—hopefully by other disabled veterans, who often have a hard time finding work when they come home.

Wisconsin is full of John Millers—ordinary people with ingenuity, determination, and civic spirit to become not just successful but engines of economic opportunity for their whole communities, committed to the common good.

I am so proud of all the remarkable potential I have seen in Wisconsin: the Global Water Center in Milwaukee, which will open this summer as an incubator for water technology businesses; the partnership of Johnson Controls and UW-Milwaukee for the Innovation Campus research park in Wauwatosa; the advances in energy-efficiency technology being realized at Orion Energy Systems in Manitowoc, WI; the work on sustainable biofuels at the Great Lakes Bioenergy Research Center in Madison; and small business incubators at technical colleges across our State helping to build the dreams of entrepreneurs.

These stories of innovation and cooperation and these exciting opportunities to build an economy made to last are happening all over our country.

I am going to let people in on a little secret. We here in the Senate can be innovative too. We can cooperate. We can

get excited by these opportunities. It is true of Democrats and Republicans alike because none of us came here just to audition for cable news or to win our next election before the bumper stickers from the last one even come off the cars.

I have already had the great joy of working with colleagues from both parties, and I know neither party has a monopoly on compassion or common sense. There is nothing liberal or conservative about wanting to help our manufacturers compete and win on the world stage. There is not a Senator in this body whose heart has not broken when listening to a constituent who cannot seem to get ahead. We cannot fix all of those gaps in our economy with one bill. Not even "Fighting Bob" La Follette could close that divide in our political system with one speech.

I am using this speech, my first here on the Senate floor, to say that I am ready to work hard and work with anyone to make progress on these challenges and help move this great country forward.

I yield the floor.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, before the Senator from Wisconsin leaves the floor, I would like to indicate how thrilled I am to have another Great Lakes Senator with us in the Senate. Senator BALDWIN is an invaluable member of the Budget Committee. She is fighting hard for Wisconsin agriculture. Now that we are in the middle of the efforts on the farm bill, I know she is deeply involved and concerned about our men and women who provide the food we put on our tables every day.

We thank the Senator for her leadership. We are so pleased to have Senator BALDWIN in the Senate.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

AGRICULTURE REFORM, FOOD, AND JOBS ACT OF 2013

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of S. 954, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 954) to reauthorize agricultural programs through 2018.

Pending:

Stabenow (for Leahy) amendment No. 998, to establish a pilot program for gigabit Internet projects in rural areas.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

AMENDMENT NO. 960

Mr. INHOFE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to set aside the pending amendment and call up Senate amendment No. 960 and ask for its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection to setting aside the pending amendment?